Introduction

In the previous module we looked at working with coursebooks and cherry-picking coursebook materials in combination with supplementary lessons to design a short scheme of work. This module looks at the other side of the coin in the sense that it is focused on working without printed and published textbook materials and explores methods and ideas for creating and using authentic teaching materials and resources.

Authentic materials relate to any resource that has been produced primarily for the consumption of English speakers. That is to say any cultural artefact that contains the English language in written or oral form.

Teachers new to EFL are in a privileged position compared to their predecessors in the past in that the development of the Internet has created a treasure trove of easily available materials and resources that can be adapted to suit every possible scenario. However, many of these materials may not be immediately suitable and may need to be differentiated and modified to suit specific student needs just as authentic printed materials (magazine articles, newspapers, books, etc.) may also need to be modified or skillfully presented.

Reasons for Adapting Resources and Materials

Authentic materials, either taken from textual sources online or in print, are easily available but it is worth bearing in mind the following reasons for ensuring they are suitable and adapting them accordingly:

- **Level of difficulty**
  Is the material appropriate for the learners’ level? If the learners are at beginner level or just above, simplify vocabulary or context elements to render sections of text and listening comprehension segments easier for them to understand. Conversely, if materials are too easy for higher level groups then the resource will fail to challenge the students and they may become easily bored and distracted.

- **Appropriate Length**
  Lessons and study sessions are most often time-controlled. If textual material was required for an activity or segment for a short classroom practice activity or warm-up/lead-in task, a longer authentic language piece may need to be excerpted or shortened to make it fit into the structure of the lesson. A shorter piece may need additions in the way of activities or discussions to flesh out its usefulness in the classroom setting.

- **Use of Grammar or Language**
  Extensive use of grammar or structures not known to the learners may be featured in the authentic language passage. Adjustments, then, would likely be necessary in the form of glossaries, key word definitions or explanations of language aspects before the use of the passage.
• **Adapt for Specific Student Needs**

The choice of an authentic language reading or listening passage may well be determined by a specific context, grammatical point or language structure the class is focusing on. If teaching an ESP course (English for Specific Purposes), such as a Business English course, then the context and relevancy of the materials chosen comes to the foreground of considerations when sourcing authentic materials.

If the teacher has conducted a detailed information gathering and needs analysis of his/her students at the start of the course (see Module Two), then knowledge of the students may inform them that certain learning styles should also be addressed. Changing authentic language materials from one form to another may be required to suit specific student needs. A reading passage could become a listening exercise, a listening passage could be developed into a grammar-themed presentation or writing, or class speaking/discussion activities may be sparked off by controversial or newsworthy materials.

**Traditional Resources and Materials**

**Flashcards**

Flashcards with photographs and drawings were a mainstay of the EFL teacher’s armoury before the explosion of multimedia resources. Flashcards are particularly useful as visual prompts for conveying meaning and eliciting responses from lower level learners, and are still an essential tool for teaching vocabulary. Many ‘old-school’ EFL teachers will tell of spending long hours looking through magazines for suitable images, or images that may serve a purpose or function in the classroom, cutting them out and sticking them on to pieces of cardboard – a laborious and time-consuming pastime. As stated above, however, the advent of the Internet and search engines such as Google Images and Microsoft Word Art means that in this day and age an appropriate or stimulating image is little more than a couple of clicks away. Flashcards are not just useful for teaching vocabulary, however; they can, with a little imagination and ingenuity, be used for almost any purpose. The teaching of narrative tenses or recounting stories, for example, can be energised by using visual prompts to spark ideas and get the students’ imaginations rolling.

**Task 9A**

Assuming that you have access to the Internet (you are, after all, studying an online course), search the web for suitable images which could be used to illustrate the following emotive words:

Love, Hate, Happiness, Anger, Sadness, Boredom, Seriousness and Silliness.
Realia
Realia refers to ‘real objects’ and so covers just about anything that can be safely or comfortably used in a classroom. Some of the best realia are everyday objects or items that students may not be familiar with – certain tools or household/kitchen utensils may flabbergast, bemuse and enthrall students in developing countries who have no conception of such things existing. A simple exercise with realia is to take in to the class three or four unusual and random objects and invite the students to write a story that contains all three objects. Similarly, realia is very useful for teaching adjectives and descriptive language phrases. Pass the objects round and have the students describe how they feel, if they are hard/soft or rough/smooth, or what they might be used for, etc.

Newspapers and Magazines
Authentic newspaper and magazine articles are a very useful resource for higher level students but need to be carefully chosen and presented. EFL coursebooks contain what appear on the surface to be authentic textual articles on a variety of topics for reading lessons. However, these articles are not authentic and have been carefully worded to highlight a particular grammatical structure or linguistic function and for their level-specific readability. Often students who have learned English via EFL coursebooks may struggle with authentic media materials for the simple reason that the level of language used is much richer and more varied than they are used to. SMOGGING authentic textual articles (see Module Six) is a useful method for determining the language level and if it is appropriate for a particular class. Media language, particularly in tabloid newspapers, is quite distinct from the formalised written English that some students may be used to as it is riddled with idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs. After SMOGGING a text, read through it again to check for idioms and other meta-linguistic forms that may be unfamiliar to your students. Always start with a lead-in activity or discussion before presenting a written text and pre-teach some of the essential vocabulary. Do not dissect the text word by word, however, as providing the opportunity for the students to decipher the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary from the context is a vital and powerful learning process.

Cloze Exercises / Worksheets
Cloze exercises (or more commonly known as gap-fill worksheets) are useful resources for practising particular grammar points. Generally it is easier to photocopy exercises from commercially produced books, as creating your own grammar practice exercises is more tricky and time-consuming than it may first appear. A typical grammar practice cloze exercise will consist of a series of sentences with the student required to fill in the correct form in the ‘gap’ provided, usually with a prompt in brackets:

For example
My grandfather ________ (died) in 1990 and my grandmother ______ ______ (lived) alone since then.

Although cloze exercises such as the example above have their place for quick revision or controlled practice exercises, they have their drawbacks. Students can get overly familiar with the form and quickly become quite adept at working out the answers, rather as if doing a daily crossword puzzle, and this does not necessarily mean that they actually understand the rules behind the grammar and/or why the answer is right or wrong.

A challenging variation of the above exercise is a gap-fill exercise in which the words which are gapped are presented in their root form. In this way, students have to choose the correct word from the contexts given and supply the appropriate form of the word, such as a different derivation or different tense.

**Task 9B**

Another variation which can help students to understand the various derivations for a word is a gap-fill exercise with several different contexts for one word, each showing a different form or derivation. The example below shows five sentences based around the word ‘theory’. Chose the most appropriate word for the gap, it isn’t as easy as it first appears.

(theory, theorists, theories, theoretical, theorises)

1) Hitler did not fully understand Nietzsche’s ________ of ‘the will to power’.
2) It is often quite difficult to put ________ into practice.
3) Many ________ believe carbon emissions are the cause of global warming.
4) A ________ understanding of statistics is vital when studying psychology.
5) Schopenhauer ________ that everybody should swallow a live toad for breakfast.

Longer cloze exercises of a couple of paragraphs that require the student to choose an appropriate word to fill in the gap are a better gauge of language sensitivity and the context in which the information is presented.

**For example:**

**Summary of Chapter 7 of ‘Lord of The Flies’ by William Golding**

Simon ______ that Ralph is thinking about home. He ______ Ralph that he knows that he will make it back all right. Ralph thinks Simon is batty, or______, and asks him ________ if he has a ship in his pocket.

*On their way to the mountain, the boys hunt for pig. Ralph gets his first*
at hunting, and he enjoys it. He is able to get his spear into the pig.

Jack is slightly by the boar because he waited too long to put his _____ into him. Simon tells Jack to suck on the wound to make it better.

After this the boys get excited and start to ______ they are hunting a pig. They use Robert as the pig. The boys get too ______ and Robert ends up getting hurt. Jack and Ralph play it off as if it were nothing but a game. Ralph says that he once got badly hurt while playing, or rugby. Jack says next time they should have a littlun play the pig.

(experience, tells, spear, realizes, crazy, sarcastically, pretend, involved, injured, rugger)

Digital and Multimedia Materials and Resources

As stated in the introduction, contemporary TEFL teachers have a wealth of material at their fingertips due to massive advances in multimedia technology over the past two decades. However, it is important to use these ‘all-singing, all-dancing’ hi-tech teaching props judiciously and be mindful that lessons do not become all surface glitz with limited substance. There is no substitution for providing as much opportunity as possible for the students to practise speaking and personalising their language acquisition. Sitting a class in front of an English language video for 30 minutes and asking them to answer some comprehension questions at the end constitutes a very passive approach to teaching and learning when the goal should be to keep the class active and involved at all times.

PowerPoint Presentations

If you are lucky enough to have access to a projector or electronic Smart Board, basing your lessons around audiovisual presentations can save a lot of time writing hurriedly on to whiteboards or blackboards. Grammar structures and examples can be prepared in advance and augmented with all manner of visual prompts and illustrations. Audio and video clips can be embedded into the presentations for quick listening comprehension exercises. The Internet is awash with interactive games and resources to cover most areas of language teaching, and modern technology can make lessons very funky and fun, especially for younger learners.

Recently, however, academic research has shown that AV presentations can be a hindrance to proactive, autonomous learning. Students will often ask for a copy or photocopied handout of the PowerPoint slides to refer to and this is where the problem lies. The hard copy becomes a substitute for them actually engaging fully with the materials being presented – a sort of safety net. Therefore it is good practice to insist that students make their own hand-written notes, or set up individual learning diaries and journals for students to record what they learnt in class and when. By encouraging them to take full
responsibility for recording their own personalised experiences and reflections on their learning, students will retain far more from the lessons than they will from a photocopied handout of an AV presentation that they will doubtless rarely, if ever, look at again.

**Audio and Video Clips**

Authentic video materials are potentially very powerful resources for language learning but need to be carefully and adroitly utilised in the classroom. Before showing a video clip it is vital to generate interest in the topic presented. Ask the students questions around the subject and present any tricky vocabulary. Short, information-heavy video clips of between two and five minutes are the most effective resource, e.g. television adverts or film trailers or funny clips from comedy sketch shows. Prepare comprehension questions and concept questions to check for global understanding just as if conducting a reading or listening task. Always ask the students to reflect on what they have watched and provide space for them to personalise their responses, i.e. Did they like it? If not why? Did they find it funny? What was funny about it?

**Task 9C**

Watch the following clip from BBC mockumentary ‘Bellamy’s People’ (click link below) and devise five comprehension questions to ask a class to check for understanding and two open-ended questions for a post-viewing discussion and reflection stage. Be mindful it is a satirical show and it is almost impossible to understand the character Early D (played by Felix Dexter).

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzFUN7k_fI

**Conclusion**

Developing authentic materials and resources is a key element of any teacher’s toolkit. It also provides the opportunity for the teacher to be creative and give vent to their imagination. It is good practice to develop a sensitivity to the possibilities of everyday objects and cultural artefacts as potential teaching aids. We are surrounded by ‘stuff’ which we take for granted but with a little creative thinking and planning, these things can often be used as a valuable adjunct in the teaching and learning process. Take something as seemingly banal as a bus timetable; there are lots of ways it could be used in the classroom, from planning journeys (future simple tense) to role plays about asking directions and travel details to creating problem-solving activities. It goes without saying that all resources need to be given a ‘test drive’ with a group or class and then adapted or modified accordingly. It is also true that a resource that works really well with one group will not necessarily be as enthusiastically received with another. However, building a ‘bank’ of effective resources for your classroom will make the planning and delivery of your lessons much easier over time and will ensure that you are never stuck for something to do should you need a quick activity to fill time.